

# A Preliminary Outline and Design for the Establishment of an Ecovillage Design School



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# Institute for the Design of Ecovillages in the Americas (I.D.E.A.)

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## Rationale

There is a perceived need for the world to begin producing an abundance of competent, qualified, ecologically sensitive Ecovillage Designers. As of now there does not exist anywhere in the world a formalized, accredited course of study designed to prepare aspiring Ecovillage Designers for the intricacies and complexities of their task. The Institute for the Design of Ecovillages in the Americas (IDEA) is being conceived to fill this niche by offering in-depth, comprehensive, accredited education specifically in the emerging new discipline of Ecovillage Design, and specifically within the cultural milieu of the Americas.

*(Editor's note: This original vision was written at the climax of a Bachelor of Arts degree, when the primary focus was on "Ecovillage" Design. Now, twelve years later, Village Design Institute has expanded their repertoire to include education, design, and consultation additionally within the contexts of Urban Village and Traditional Village. In all cases, it is the village scale which is most meaningful. It is a little humorous reading this original vision today, after Village Design Institute has been incorporated; nevertheless, there are some important concepts introduced here and the evolution of thought can be discerned.)*

## Statement of Purpose

The Institute for the Design of Ecovillages in the Americas is being created to offer a comprehensive, multidisciplinary education in the fundamental principles of Ecovillage Design. The Institute is a school, a college, an academy, a setting provided for a formalized course of study designed to produce competent, qualified, ecologically sensitive Ecovillage Designers. The Institute will set a global professional standard for the quality, depth, and thoroughness of knowledge required to conceive and create successful, authentic, self-reliant, 21<sup>st</sup> century ecovillages. The Institute is being established to ensure that the emerging new discipline of Ecovillage Design is given a focused academic presentation, and thus international credibility. And, the Institute is being established to provide a concentration of resources to promote ongoing, high-quality, multi-disciplinary thinking in the emerging new field of Ecovillage Design.

## Ethics

The primary ethics of the Institute can be interpreted by the primary ethics of Permaculture, which are:

- 1) Take care of the Earth
- 2) Take care of other people
- 3) Convert all surplus resources to the fulfillment and attainment of (1) and (2)

This simple yet inclusive set of directives will constitute the fundamental values that will guide and inform all activities, functions, positions, and decisions of the school, including:

- A) Mission Statement
- B) Curriculum development
- C) Affiliation and inter-organizational relationships
- D) Legal structure and disbursement of benefits
- E) Community relations, including relations with biotic communities at all levels
- F) Faculty and student body representation

These ethics, in fact, precede the Rationale and Statement of Purpose since internalizing and adhering to these ethics automatically encourages and leads to a worldview that necessitates the emergence of true Ecovillages, and thus validates the need for an Institute of Ecovillage Design.

## Location/Affiliation

The Institute for the Design of Ecovillages in the Americas will be centered at a location somewhere in Ecotopia, in the Pacific Northwest of America. This location is chosen because of the region's sympathetic attitude towards an ecological restructuring of society (the Ecotopian precedent) and because of the high concentration of enlightened, progressive, ecologically sensitive thinkers and educators residing there. Also present in the bioregion are numerous quality institutions of higher learning, many alternative, that have introduced concepts and programs concordant with the goals of the Institute.

IDEA is a private, highly focused, specialized college, yet because of the wide array of multidisciplinary content in its curriculum, will have an affiliation with many other institutions of higher learning in the bioregion, including:

- 1) Fairhaven College, WWU
- 2) Pacific Lutheran University
- 3) Seattle Pacific University
- 4) Evergreen State College
- 5) University of British Columbia
- 6) Antioch University
- 7) Bastyr College
- 8) The Cornish Institute
- 9) Kepler College
- 10) The San Francisco Institute of Architecture

These affiliations will support access of the IDEA student body to selected courses and units of study at existing colleges and universities, as well as provide the opportunity for these other students to gain access and exposure to alternative curriculum at the Institute. Interested professors from these other institutions will have the opportunity to come and offer creative, innovative courses at the Institute of Ecovillage Design, as guest residents. Likewise, the core group of educators from the Institute will have the opportunity to go to these other institutions and offer "Introduction to Ecovillage" courses. A network of highly trained, progressive, ecologically sensitive educators will thus be encouraged and established throughout

Ecotopia, all of whom share an interest in the development of the Ecovillage vision but for whom no outlet yet exists.

The Institute also will encourage and arrange for an adjunct faculty of specialists, in many non-academic fields, whose understanding is necessary for the creation of Ecovillages. The Institute will be professionally staffed by a core group of educators whose specialty is Ekistics, or, the scientific, multidisciplinary approach to the design of sustainable human settlements.

The central location of the Institute will be the site of rigorous academic instruction in the fundamental principles of Ecovillage Design, combined with and complemented by practical hands-on application (see Curriculum). The central location also will be the brain center of an emerging new Ecovillage, situated on a Land Trust (see Legal Structure). The central location will be surrounded by a Permaculture Demonstration Site, with gardens and orchards, and could be considered to be the nucleus of a growing village organism. This fundamental arrangement will then become the model for the development of new Ecovillages, all of which will have at the core an Ecovillage Design School. Students will graduate being prepared to seed these new Ecovillages by mimicking the patterns and processes of the original model, with space for enormous adaptation and diversification after the seeds have sprouted.

The Institute also will have auxiliary nodes located throughout the world, within existing ecovillages in the Global Ecovillage Network (GEN). These nodes will be staffed by a resident professor from the Institute, and will include classroom space, with a library, drafting table, computer equipment, and supplies. Students will have the opportunity to travel to these sites and learn from the processes and projects already in place, in different climates and regions than their own, and meet fellow Village Designers from around the globe. Graduate students will be able to participate in and make a real contribution to the work of the community, by undertaking Independent Study practica in their specialty, under the guidance of the resident professor. This affiliation with the Global Ecovillage Network will be an important aspect of the Institute of Ecovillage Design (IDEA), and a close relationship will exist between the two; ideally, the Institute of Ecovillage Design will be the educational arm of GEN.

Additionally, there will be auxiliary nodes set up at selected traditional villages, so that students can experience the flow of life in these authentic pastoral settings, thus adding valuable understanding to their comprehension of Village Design. Located at each of these nodes will be an office, a Permaculture Demonstration Site, and a representative of the Institute. While at these auxiliary sites, students will participate in the work of the community and will undertake Independent Study Projects of their own self-direction.

## Curriculum

An education in Ecovillage Design is primarily an in-depth investigation of Human Ecology, as it is applied to the creation of sustainable human settlements. Through the course of the school, students will look very closely at the interdependent relationships between human beings and their environment, and how these relationships can be enhanced and made mutually productive through the thoughtful design of human living situations, ecologically integrated into their environments – Ecovillages by definition. After exploring and integrating fundamental principles, students will be encouraged to create thoughtful, innovative solutions to enhance and facilitate mutually beneficial relationships between human beings and their environment.

For the purposes of the school, Human Ecology will be further divided into these sub-disciplines:

- 1) Natural Sciences
- 2) Natural Processes
- 3) Anthropology
- 4) Psychology
- 5) The Arts
- 6) Spirituality and Religion
- 7) Human Relationships
- 8) Economics
- 9) Permaculture (Applied Human Ecology)

These categories are meant to provide a comprehensive overview of the full spectrum of human experiences and the natural world that is the context in which these experiences take place. The curriculum of the school will be a balanced, multidisciplinary investigation into each of these sub-disciplines; the sub-disciplines will be continually related and applied back to the design of sustainable human settlements for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. There are numerous subjects that can be studied within each sub-discipline, and many students will prefer to specialize, yet each of these categories will be touched upon so that a true multi- and inter-disciplinary education results.



The school will synthesize, in equal proportion, rigorous and thorough academic study with applied, hands-on experience. As the academic component is an inclusive study of Human Ecology, so the practical component is, appropriately, a study in Applied Human Ecology, or Permaculture. This important aspect of the school will be hands-on implementation of ecological designs, where theory is immediately applied in practice. This work will be primarily carried out at the Institute's host, expanding Ecovillage (the central location) as students continually, progressively apply detailed designs to the Ecovillage as it grows. That is the fundamental model propounded by the Institute: At the center of every new, emerging Ecovillage is a school of Ecovillage Design, whose students crank out detailed designs in the many intricate and multi-faceted aspects of the village, as it organically grows, and then do the practical work of implementing the designs under the auspices of the staff of the school and the residents of the village. Ideally, all residents also will have access to the school.

There will be a core set of subjects that all students will be required to take, constituting the essence of the fundamental principles of Ecovillage Design:

- 1) Human Ecology
- 2) Deep Ecology
- 3) Fundamentals of Ecology
- 4) General Biology
- 5) General Geology
- 6) A Pattern Language
- 7) Cultural Anthropology
- 8) Alternative Economics
- 9) Bioregionalism
- 10) Sacred Geometry
- 11) Architecture and Village Planning
- 12) Map-making and 2-, 3-, and 4-Dimensional Design
- 13) Whole Systems Thinking

The core classes will be accomplished first, within the introductory year, so that all second year students are speaking a common multi-disciplinary language. The core classes are designed to be a comprehensive "Introduction to the Fundamental Principles of Ecovillage Design," and always will be presented at the Institute's central location. Second year students will begin to have freedom of choice within the established sub-disciplines, depending on their inclinations and desired area of expertise, and may seek instruction with: 1) IDEA faculty classes at the central location; 2) ongoing, revolving guest faculty at the central location; 3) established

classes within any of the affiliated colleges or universities; or, 4) through self-designed Independent Study Projects, wherever they may be. The third year will be similar to the second, but with increasing specialization and practical implementation. The fourth year will be almost entirely independent study or internship, away from the central location, at an Ecovillage within GEN or at one of the affiliated traditional village nodes. There, the soon-to-be graduating student will undertake a Senior Project, and will be given the opportunity to apply their specialty and area of expertise to some ongoing project at the host (eco)village. Graduate students will begin to seed new, emerging Ecovillages, and will be qualified to participate in the design of comprehensive site plans.

Acceptance to the school is preceded by graduation from a certified Permaculture Design Course (PDC), where the principles of Ecological Design become the lens through which to view the world. Many of these PDCs will be taught right on site. The PDC is an initiation of sorts, an introduction to a community of like-minded people, and offers a firm, common foundation from which to begin the study of Ecovillage Design. It is essential as a starting point: Ecovillage Design is understood to be advanced and ultimate Permaculture Design. After this pre-requisite, students may be accepted on their own merit.

Additionally, all incoming students will participate in an introductory quarter, always held in the Spring, so that the school and the students synchronize with the yearly Earth cycle. Even more fundamental than the 'core curriculum,' the introductory quarter is designed to inculcate personal, life-promoting skills essential for successful, individual participation in group life and the smooth functioning of a village (and the school). These skills are so fundamental, and so important, that they are routinely ignored and taken for granted at most colleges and universities, but at IDEA they are considered first. They are:

- 1) Interpersonal Communication
- 2) Conflict Resolution and Group Process
- 3) Organic Gardening
- 4) Awareness through the Body
- 5) Introduction to Ecovillages (Demonstrations from around the world)

The Introductory Quarter is always held at the central location, and facilitated by core IDEA staff. It is very much like an extended "Experience Week," Findhorn's model for quickly developing community among new participants.

Interpersonal Communication needs to be taught to every incoming student, at every college or university. The goal is to develop skills in listening, speaking, and conversation, so that students are able to clearly exchange ideas with one

another and with staff, and to be understood. These communication skills at IDEA will be based upon the cognition theories of Bateson and Maturana and Varela.

Conflict Resolution and Group Process will develop the ability in students to work in groups to achieve collective goals. These are absolutely necessary skills in the smooth functioning of community life, and in the successful operation of professional Ecovillage Design Teams. Collective consciousness will be facilitated by the segregation of students into clans: small groups they will work with and represent for the duration of the quarter.

Organic Gardening is the first hands-on class taken by all students, their first Spring quarter. It is absolutely necessary for Ecovillage Designers to know how to grow food and to design gardens, because these are the fundamental organic processes that, when compounded, grow into successful Ecovillages. The gardening is done at the Permaculture Demonstration Site, surrounding the center, where money is made selling produce, herbs, and flowers, whose profits then get contributed to a Festival Fund.

Awareness through the Body is introduced at the outset to support the school's philosophy that only mind-body union can achieve full apprehension of knowledge. It is a goal of the school to promote complete wellness among its student 'body,' as a way of life. It is a conviction of the Institute that an Ecovillage setting will promote complete wellness among its resident population (as well as among its surrounding ecological communities). So, Awareness through the Body, as well as Somatics in general, is a recurring theme with continual attention at all stages of the school experience (see Healing Center under Legal Structure).

The Introductory Quarter, then, is an holistic investigation and involvement in real-life promoting skills and concepts that are fundamental to the school's philosophy, and, which prepares students to successfully participate in the processes of the school, which are, of course, a microcosm of the processes of life in an Ecovillage.

Additionally, in recognition of the observation that there exists a large population of prospective students who are not ready for, nor desire, a thorough academic, accredited, four-year education to prepare for comprehensive Ecovillage Design, yet who nevertheless wish to be professionally involved in the manifestation of Ecovillages, the Institute will arrange for an alternative track. Vocational in nature, the alternative track will provide education in specific technical skills, such as: solar, wind, and/or hydro power installation; alternative building construction techniques such as straw-bale, cob, ferro-cement, rammed earth, etc.; organic gardening and marketing; orcharding and Integrated Pest Management; aquaculture; animal husbandry and beekeeping, etc., etc. While not accredited through a major university, these courses will nevertheless offer completing

students credit through an internal accounting system monitored and approved by the Global Ecovillage Network, to ensure that these students can work cumulatively towards a goal, and receive recognition for work accomplished. These technical, vocationally-oriented courses will be presented in the form of workshops offered by visiting specialists in the field, and will contribute to the growth and construction of the host Ecovillage.

## Legal Structure

This a very rough outline, a more formal structure pending qualified legal advice; nevertheless, it is sound in its basic conceptual format:

- 1) First comes the Trust. The Trust is set up to finance the development of the world's first fully-functioning Ecovillage. The Trust will attract investors who are keen on the Ecovillage vision, and who wish to contribute funds to and gain the tax breaks of a Trust. The Trust will attract investors because of the international reputations of its Board, and because of the professional presentation of its goals and detailed analysis of a strategy for implementation. The Trust will be assigned to purchase real property for the establishment of the Ecovillage, and will be entrusted to do enough business to ensure the maintenance of the original value of its deposits. The property purchased will be in the contiguous USA, but the Trust itself will be officially registered offshore, to avoid as much as possible entanglement with the U.S. Government corporation. One purpose of the Trust will be to legally arrange for the property purchased to be *fully sovereign*, and not subject to the laws, regulations, zoning, and tax requirements of the U.S. Government corporation, or any of its state or local representatives. The Ecovillage and its encompassing property will become *sovereign territory*, subject to the rights and responsibilities guaranteed by the Constitution for *free individuals* and entities residing in the Republic.
- 2) The Trust will propagate many for-profit businesses, which are the businesses of the Ecovillage. These for-profit businesses will be set up to funnel net profits back into the Trust, so that the Trust may continue to carry on its business of purchasing property and propagating more businesses. One of the first businesses established by the Trust will be the Institute for the Design of Ecovillages in the Americas – I.D.E.A The Trust will provide initial start-up expenses, such as equipment and salaries. I.D.E.A. will be established as the brain-center of the new Ecovillage, an accredited college to attract students of Ecovillage Design to come, learn, contribute designs, and do implementation work for the Ecovillage as it grows. I.D.E.A will be authorized to charge competing tuition as a private college. After all expenses and salaries have been disbursed, remaining profits will be funneled back

into the Trust, a portion of which will be reserved for scholarships and grants.

- 3) The Trust will propagate many non-profit businesses. One of the first non-profits established will be a Healing Center that is the sister organization of I.D.E.A. As I.D.E.A is the Yang, the Healing Center is the Yin; as I.D.E.A. is the brain, the Healing Center is the heart, complementary polarities of a Unity that is the center of the Ecovillage. The Healing Center will set up many therapies and practices that will later be used by residents of the Ecovillage, as it grows, as well as providing services to the surrounding communities. The Healing Center also will provide space, instruction, and activities for the somatic components of I.D.E.A., including: a meditation sanctuary with morning and evening sessions; a large floor for morning and evening yoga, regular Tai Chi and other martial arts, and aerobic or creative dancing; whirlpools; sauna; massage; weight-room; naturopathic remedies, etc., etc. Students and faculty of I.D.E.A. will have full access to the Healing Center, and so will residents of the Ecovillage, as it grows...